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SUBJECT: FRETILIN, CNRT LEAD AS PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION COUNT
CONTINUES

DILI 00000247 001.2 OF 003

11. (SBU) Summary: East Timor's parliamentary elections went remarkably smoothly despite last minute logistical challenges brought on by an unseasonable period of heavy rains in the days leading up to the June 30 poll. International observers, including US mission teams present in almost all districts, have so far evaluated the poll as free and fair. Initial delays in the counting, now taking place at district counting centers, have mostly been overcome and close to 40 percent of the count was complete as of late afternoon on July 2. Initial results show the ruling FRETILIN party leading, but with a percentage well shy of a majority. The National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) is in second place and appears to be well positioned to lead an opposition party coalition comprising a clear majority. Despite the smooth sailing, some complaints and questions regarding possibly fraudulent observer batches have slightly marred the process and point to possible future challenges of the legitimacy of the results, particularly by FRETILIN. End summary.

Smooth voting process

12. (U) East Timor's parliamentary elections went remarkably smoothly despite last minute logistical challenges brought on by an unseasonable period of heavy rains in the days leading up to the June 30 poll. According to the Technical Secretariat for Election Administration (STAE), 50 locations required final delivery of election materials by horse and porter as a result of the rains. However, in the end, only five polling stations, in Viqueque and Manufahi districts, received materials late and delayed their opening by several hours as a result. US mission observers, who monitored the elections in all but two of East Timor's 13 districts, in general found that the process went very smoothly on election day. Other international missions, which deployed close to 500 observers nationwide, have likewise pronounced the June 30 poll as free and fair as well as proceeding in a very orderly and calm manner. Several minor incidents were reported over the course of the day, such as a

fight in Viqueque that broke out when a would-be voter presented the voting card of a person known to be deceased. However, such incidents were rare and in all cases effectively dealt with by police and polling officials on the scene.

Delays and hiccups as counting underway

13. (U) The transport of uncounted ballots from the polling centers to district counting centers also went smoothly according to all reports, despite worries that this part of the process would represent the greatest vulnerability to fraud. The polling was well-scrutinized by almost 500 observers from international groups including the UNDP, IRI, NDI, the Carter Center, the European Union, the Japanese Government, and CPLP, the organization of Portuguese speaking-countries. Our observers participated in long, festive, well monitored and secure convoys that wound their ways to district capitals collecting ballots from multiple polling centers along the way. However, once at the counting centers, the initial processing of the ballots, required in order to pool each districts votes before any counting could begin, was a laborious process, in most places stretching into the next day and leading to delays in counting. Further delays and controversies arose at some counting centers regarding access for political party agents to monitor the process.

15. (SBU) The counting center in Dili was particularly noisy on the evening of June 30 as a group of FRETILIN "observers" - including well-known national party figures and Members of Parliament - complained that boxes were being opened without their party agents present. According to our current information, one of their agents was in fact present, but others were at the entrance waiting to get in. The FRETILIN party agents are reportedly now filing a complaint regarding the boxes opened during this period and several of them walked out of the count this morning in protest of the boxes being included in

DILI 00000247 002.2 OF 003

ongoing counting. Meanwhile, questions have been raised regarding the observer badges held by the original complainants, which appear to either be fraudulent or illegally issued by STAE. Similar badges were discovered by observers throughout the eastern district of Lautem on election day. Overall, while not so far seriously undermining the process, these developments raise the specter of FRETILIN continuing to challenge the process and possibly rejecting as illegitimate the outcome.

Initial results show FRETILIN leading, but CNRT strong

16. (U) With just under 40 percent of the count complete, the current results are as follows, with first round results from each party's candidate in the April 2007 first round of the presidential race in parentheses for comparison:

-- The ruling FRETILIN party in first place with 32.1% (27.9%)

-- Former President Xanana Gusmao's National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction (CNRT) coming in second with 22.3% (21.8%)

-- The coalition of the Social Democratic Association of Timor and the Social Democratic Party (ASDT/PSD) in third with 15.6% (23%)

-- The Democratic Party (PD) in fourth with 11.3% (19.2%)

-- The coalition of KOTA and PPT in a distant fifth with 4.1% (3.7%)

17. (U) However, it should be noted that the status of results varies significantly from district to district, and the eastern districts where FRETILIN is strongest also produced the fastest results. Thus, while these figures provide a sense of the trend, significant changes are likely to still occur,

particularly in the FRETILIN and CNRT numbers, with the former possibly going down, and the latter increasing. In particular, the Dili count has been very slow, starting only on July 2; with its largest voting bloc of any district in the country, it appears to be heavily favoring CNRT so far, but less than 10 percent is included in the current national tally. However, the overall picture of FRETILIN, CNRT, ASDT/PSD, and PD competing for most of the votes is expected to hold in all districts. The only exception is the KOTA/PPT coalition which appears set to be one of the top vote getters in Ainaro district. KOTA/PPT is also the only party in addition to the top four that appears set to surpass the three percent threshold to gain admission to parliamentary representation, leaving the strong likelihood that 9 of the 14 competing parties will not be represented in parliament.

18. (U) Both PD and the ASDT/PSD coalition have taken a hit in comparison with their candidates' support in the presidential race, despite their solid western bases. PD, only recently considered the strongest of the opposition parties, has in particular seen a surprising drop off compared to its nearly 20 percent pull in the first round presidential race. This can mostly be explained by the "PD Xananista" phenomenon, that is, the large number of party members who, while retaining long-term allegiance to the party, opted to vote for Xanana Gusmao's CNRT.

19. (SBU) Comment: There is still a chance for counting to veer off course, but in general we expect it to continue relatively smoothly. However, as results start to crystallize the environment is likely to get more heated. Most international observer missions, while citing the success of the process so far, caveat that evaluation with the question of whether party leaders and their grassroots supporters will accept the results, with the ruling FRETILIN party of greatest concern. We will continue to track results and the potential for problematic reactions closely. Then come the challenges of forming a coalition government and executing a peaceful, efficient

DILI 00000247 003.2 OF 003

transfer of power. End comment.
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